Annex to the letter dated 21 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Aide-memoire explaining the real situation concerning the Skripal case

1. On 12 March 2018, the British Prime Minister, Theresa May, speaking before the House of Commons of the Parliament of the United Kingdom, declared that it was "highly likely" that the Russian Federation was responsible for the poisoning on 4 March 2018 in Salisbury of Sergei Skripal, a former colonel in the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation and a double agent, and Yulia Skripal, his daughter, using the nerve agent designated by the British as A-234.

The United Kingdom has publicly alleged that Russia is concealing part of its chemical weapons arsenal and has made use of it, thus implying that Russia has violated its commitments under the Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on Their Destruction (Chemical Weapons Convention) — one of the most effective multilateral treaties in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation, which Russia has supported from the outset.

In making this allegation, the United Kingdom has taken aim not only at Russia, but also at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and all the tremendous work carried out under its watch, including with the participation of the United Kingdom, over the past two decades.

The Russian Federation has submitted a full declaration of its chemical weapons stockpile as required under article III of the Chemical Weapons Convention. This information was thoroughly checked and verified by teams of inspectors from the OPCW Technical Secretariat. In its capacity as the competent international authority, OPCW has officially confirmed that the Russian chemical weapons stockpile has been completely destroyed.

2. In the face of such grave accusations, the Russian Embassy in London sent the Foreign Office a note verbale on 12 March 2018 requesting access to the materials used in the investigation, including samples of the chemical substance identified by the British investigators, so that these could be examined by experts as part of a joint investigation.

In so doing, we had proposed acting in accordance with article IX, paragraph 2, of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which stipulates that States parties to the Convention should resolve, through an exchange of information and bilateral consultations, any matter which may cause doubt about compliance with this international agreement. In accordance with article IX, Russia would have been prepared to respond to a request from the United Kingdom within a period of 10 days.

It is regrettable that, rather than adhering to existing international legal norms, the British have instead chosen to unscrupulously politicize the matter.

3. The British Prime Minister requested that a special meeting of the United Nations Security Council be held on 14 March 2018 to discuss the situation. Anticipating foul play, Russia insisted on keeping the Security Council meeting open.

It is unclear what the British were trying to achieve by involving the Security Council, which has no mandate with respect to this matter. It is clear, however, that until OPCW issues its conclusions and an assessment of the Salisbury incident —

including whether a nerve agent was indeed used and, if it was, how the potential source of the chemicals was identified, what measures were taken to assist the victims and on what grounds — there is simply no point discussing the matter.

4. On 14 March 2018, the British Prime Minister, having apparently come to her senses somewhat, sent a letter to Ahmet Üzümcü, Director-General of the OPCW Technical Secretariat, who circulated it to the member States of the OPCW Executive Council on 15 March 2018, in which she invited the Technical Secretariat to conduct an independent review of the British investigation of the Salisbury incident.

According to the Foreign Office press release dated 18 March 2018, further to the Prime Minister's letter, the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom to OPCW invited the experts of the OPCW Technical Secretariat to come to the United Kingdom and conduct an independent review of the conclusions reached by the British laboratory at Porton Down regarding the Salisbury incident. The experts arrived in the United Kingdom on 19 March 2018.

Russia is looking forward to an official, detailed report by OPCW on all aspects of the Skripal case. We expect the OPCW Technical Secretariat to conduct a comprehensive, independent investigation that complies with all the relevant provisions of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

5. Russia has a growing list of questions concerning both legal and practical matters. We will be persistent in seeking answers to these questions through OPCW.

For the record, Russia did not use a chemical weapon against the United Kingdom. The attack on the Skripals using toxic chemicals should be considered an act of terrorism. Since a Russian citizen, Yulia Skripal, was among the victims, we are requesting that the British cooperate with us in accordance with article IX of the Chemical Weapons Convention.

We are seeking answers to the following questions:

Where and how were samples collected from Sergei and Yulia Skripal and by whom? How was this documented? Who can certify the reliability of the collected data? Did the procedures to collect evidence comply with all OPCW chain of custody requirements?

Did the British use spectrum analysis or other methods to figure out so quickly that the chemical agent — Novichok as it is designated in the West — was allegedly used? It is our understanding that, to do this, they would have needed to have a standard sample of the agent on hand.

How can this rush to judgment be reconciled with official statements by Scotland Yard indicating that it would need weeks, if not months, to issue its findings?

What information and signs of illness prompted the decision to administer antidotes to the victims — the Skripals and the British policeman? Could this not have caused severe complications and the subsequent deterioration of their condition?

Which specific antidotes were used? What tests justified the use of these drugs?

How can the delayed effect of the nerve agent be explained, given its generally immediate effect? It was said that the victims were poisoned at a pizzeria (or else in a car, at the airport or at home, according to other information). So, what really happened? How did they end up on a park bench an unknown amount of time later?

We need an explanation for the baseless accusations specifically implicating Russia in the Skripal case, when the United Kingdom, the United States, Sweden and Czechia also worked on the development of Novichok, as it is known in the West. The results of their efforts to create new toxic agents of this type were published in more

than 200 open sources in countries that are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

6. Even in purely human terms, London's actions are nothing short of barbaric. On 4 March 2018, according to the version given by the British authorities themselves, toxic agents were used in an attack against a Russian citizen, Yulia Skripal, on British soil.

The Russian Federation is demanding that comprehensive information be provided on the progress made in the investigation of the Salisbury incident involving this Russian citizen (a note verbale to that effect was sent by the Russian Embassy in London on 12 March 2018).

The United Kingdom is violating the basic tenets of international relations by continuing to deny Russian consular officials access to Ms. Skripal, as required under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, without explanation. For more than two weeks we have been unable to reliably ascertain what happened to our citizen and her actual condition at present.

The Russian Investigative Committee office for high-profile cases opened a criminal investigation on 16 March 2018 into the attempted premeditated murder of Yulia Skripal, a citizen of the Russian Federation, and the endangerment of the general public on British soil.

The investigation will be conducted in accordance with Russian and international law. Investigators plan to involve highly qualified experts in the investigation.

The investigators stand ready to work together with the British authorities. We look forward to the cooperation of British authorities.

7. In its statements delivered to the United Nations Security Council, OPCW and all other international forums, the Russian Federation has consistently and insistently called for all crimes involving the use of toxic agents to be thoroughly, fully and professionally investigated and for the guilty parties to be held accountable.

We are ready to cooperate fully and transparently with the United Kingdom to dispel any concerns in a bilateral format, through OPCW and within the framework of other international instruments, and to act in accordance with international law.

Russia, as a responsible member of the international community and a conscientious party to the Chemical Weapons Convention, will never use the language of ultimatums or respond to unofficial oral questions.

The actions of Western countries in the Skripal case, which they themselves have fabricated, fly in the face of the rules of international law, customary international law and plain common sense. Naturally, we are keeping a careful record of all this. When the time comes, the guilty parties will be brought to justice.

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Letter dated 22 March 2018 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to inform you of the current situation regarding the implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018), with a focus on the Damascus suburb of eastern Ghouta — long overrun by terrorists who have been firing indiscriminately on Damascus city, including on Russian diplomatic missions, and perpetrating other crimes. Negotiations to end the confrontation are ongoing with those armed groups with which negotiations are possible.

Russia and Syria are doing their utmost to address the humanitarian problems in eastern Ghouta under extremely challenging circumstances. In line with Security Council resolution 2401 (2018), representatives of the Russian armed forces are carrying out an operation of unprecedented scale, the sole purpose of which is to help the residents of eastern Ghouta.

That effort has enabled the evacuation of more than 86,000 persons and the dispatch of three convoys of the United Nations, the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the International Committee of the Red Cross through the established humanitarian corridors. Representatives of the United Nations have confirmed that the evacuation was voluntary.

The operation can be observed in real time. Cameras have been placed at the Wafidin Camp and Hammuriyah checkpoints, in northern and southern parts of eastern Ghouta, respectively, and in Harasta al-Basal.

Since the morning of 22 March, more than 5,000 civilians have exited through the Wafidin Camp checkpoint. In the past 24 hours alone, hot meals have been delivered to 8,000 residents of eastern Ghouta and 2,500 food parcels have been distributed. The staff of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides in the Syrian Arab Republic have been distributing hot food, food parcels, bottled drinking water and bedding (mattresses, blankets and pillows) at checkpoints and in refugee camps. Medical assistance is being provided.

At the same time, civilians have been returning to the liberated towns of Siqba and Kafr Batna. The staff of the Centre for Reconciliation of Opposing Sides are supplying these areas with humanitarian assistance and providing people with medical assistance.

We call on the United Nations and its humanitarian agencies to step up their coordination with the Syrian authorities to assist the evacuees and all civilian victims of the conflict. We recall that the Syrian authorities have officially requested that the

United Nations send humanitarian convoys to Tanf, which has been illegally occupied by the so-called coalition, and to send a mission to assess humanitarian needs in Raqqah, which was nearly razed to the ground following bombardments by that same coalition. We are counting on the United Nations to respond without delay.

Syrians escaping from areas under jihadist control have been describing extremist crimes and a prevailing atmosphere of lawlessness, including seizures of humanitarian assistance, the use of civilians as human shields and the obstruction of the voluntary evacuation.

It is disappointing that this information is being intentionally filtered out by those who would rather give currency to unverified and blatantly false materials, including allegations of chemical weapon use by government forces. Nefarious organizations such as the White Helmets have been supplying false information, as they have at other points during the Syrian crisis.

We would like to receive an answer to our repeated question about the sources of the statistical data used by the United Nations, for example, regarding the number of people in besieged and hard-to-reach areas, civilian casualties, and alleged attacks against medical and educational facilities. Reference to "credible sources on the ground" can hardly be considered a satisfactory explanation.

Illegal armed groups are continuing to sabotage the implementation of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018) in the eastern Ghouta de-escalation area. Here are some specific examples.

On 16 March, the Jaysh al-Islam (Army of Islam) group circulated videos in the media showing its fighters destroying a helicopter belonging to government forces in eastern Ghouta.

On 20 March, as a result of a counterattack against government troop positions, fighters operating in eastern Ghouta reportedly gained control of Misraba, 10 kilometres north-east of Damascus.

On 21 March, extremists reportedly shelled neighbourhoods in central Damascus (Qassa', Qusur, Bab Sharqi, Duwaliyah and Abbasiyin square), south-eastern Damascus (Bustan al-Dayr and Zablatani) and south-western Damascus. Five civilians were killed and two were injured in the Mazzah area. Fighters from Ayn Tarma in eastern Ghouta, an area under the control of Faylaq al-Rahman (Rahman Corps), also launched a rocket attack against the Kashkul market in Jaramana, a suburb of Damascus with a mostly Christian and Druze population. It is understood that 37 persons were killed and another 35 injured.

As agreed earlier with Army of Islam leaders, an offensive was launched on 19 March by Nusrah Front and Rahman Corps field commanders against the position of Syrian armed forces in order to draw some of the government troops towards them. The town of Mudayra, 4 kilometres north-east of Damascus, was seized, as was the terrain between Harasta and Duma, respectively 7 and 15 kilometres north-east of Damascus. The offensive was accompanied by heavy artillery, shelling and car bomb attacks.

At the same time, Ahrar al-Sham and Army of Islam field commanders proceeded to prepare attacks against government troop positions near Harasta and Shaffuniyah, 14 kilometres north-east of Damascus.

In order to disrupt the redeployment of reserve units of the Syrian armed forces, group leaders instructed fighters to fire along the line of contact. Disagreements between Nusrah Front fighters and the local population of Ayn Tarma, 2 kilometres east of Damascus, escalated into an armed confrontation. In order to suppress the ability of residents to take action and to prevent their escape to areas under

government control, the field commanders organized the redeployment of additional armed gangs.

The above facts confirm our position that external sponsors are not engaging with, or are unable to engage with, the armed groups under their tutelage. This means that they are collectively responsible for the violations of Security Council resolution 2401 (2018). As developments have shown, the letter addressed to you and the President of the Security Council from the leaders of three groups, regarding their readiness to observe the truce, expel Nusrah Front terrorists and not impede humanitarian operations, was a deceptive and diversionary tactic. Attempts to make it appear that Moscow is solely responsible for the implementation of the resolution are a dishonest and politicized approach that conceals unscrupulous plans to overthrow the Syrian regime.

Rather than preserving a situation in which terrorists would thrive, we are convinced that decisive progress is now needed to restore peace and unity to the country through a political settlement, based on Security Council resolution 2254 (2015) and the outcome of the Congress of the Syrian National Dialogue held in Sochi, Russian Federation.

It should be clear to all that no solution will be found as long as there are concerted efforts to fragment Syrian territory, remove parts of it from the jurisdiction of Damascus and create parallel authority structures. We demand that the ideologues of such projects abandon this destructive practice, which violates the Charter of the United Nations and relevant Security Council resolutions. We consider it unacceptable to make the provision of economic assistance for the reconstruction of Syria dependent on various artificial pretexts, including political transformations that can be achieved only through an intra-Syrian dialogue.

I should be grateful if the present letter could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) V. **Nebenzia**